

**THE PLACE OF THE COLLEGE
GRADUATE IN AMERICAN LIFE:
AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE
THE SOCIAL UNION AT AMHERST
COLLEGE, JULY 2, 1879**

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The place of the college graduate in American life: an address delivered before the Social Union at Amherst College, July 2, 1879 by George F. Hoar

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GEORGE F. HOAR

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AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Social Union at Amherst College,

JULY 2, 1879.

Printed

BY GEORGE F. HOAR.

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1879.

ADDRESS.

I AM afraid that in accepting your invitation I have consulted my own pleasure rather than yours. I do not think you can know how unspeakably grateful to a man jaded with the care and work of public life, are expressions of good will that come to him from a company of scholars. You can hardly conceive how delightful the opportunity to change the scene by a visit to a famous college on the days of its high festival. It is like being a guest in some stately baronial hall, rich with association and tradition, from which have issued forth, and shall again, in each generation, brave knights, wise statesmen, illustrious scholars; whose walls are hung with portraits of famous wits to whom it has been native or hospitable; its cabinets rich with the contributions of science; its libraries stored with rare manuscripts and priceless editions; with its stories of royal visits, and its chambers where illustrious children were born, or illustrious guests have slept.

It is touching and pleasant to see how the men who have won the great honors and prizes of the most civilized nations, have valued the good-will of

their colleges. Canning, in one of his most famous speeches near the end of his brilliant career, claimed the sympathy of the House of Commons on account of the sacrifice he had made to his conscientious conviction in favor of Catholic emancipation. Said he :—

“ From the earliest dawn of my public life—aye, from the first vision of youthful ambition—that ambition has been directed to one object above all others. Before that object all others vanished into comparative insignificance; it was desirable to me beyond all the blandishments of power, beyond all the rewards and favors of the crown. That object was to represent the university in which I was educated. I had a fair chance of accomplishing this object when the Catholic question crossed my way. I was warned—fairly and kindly warned—that my adoption of that cause would blast my prospect. I adhered to the Catholic cause and blasted all my long-cherished hopes and expectations. Never to this hour have I stated, either in public or private, the extent of this irretrievable sacrifice; but I have felt it not the less deeply. It is past and I shall speak of it no more.”

There are men from whom the great intellect, the public service, the marvellous eloquence of Webster, cannot extort forgiveness for the political errors of his later life. But it is hard to find a lover of a New England college who does not surrender at discretion when he reads the two stories,—the one related by Mr. Webster in his autobiography, of the occasion when his father first intimated his intention of sending him to college: “ I remember that I was quite overcome and my head grew dizzy. The thing appeared to me so high, and the expense and sacrifice it was to cost my father so great, I could only press his hand and shed tears;”—the other, of that

scene in the room of the Supreme Court of the United States, where, as he concluded the argument that made safe the endowment of every college in America, the few broken words of tenderness for his Alma Mater, bursting from the heart of the strong man, melted bench and bar and audience to tears.

Visiting Oxford eleven years ago, I made the acquaintance of Mr. Cox, the accomplished librarian of the Bodleian. He had found, a few days before, in some crypt, where it had lain for two hundred years, a letter written by Lord Clarendon just after he had landed at Calais, a hopeless exile, on his last flight from the country to which he was never again to return. I have procured a copy, which you may like to hear. The great orator, statesman, historian, lawyer, judge,—counselor, companion and ancestor of monarchs,—flying for his life, in his old age, into a foreign land, from the court, of which, for a generation, he had been the ornament and head, soon as his feet touch a place of safety, thinks of his university. See the noble heart through the simple and stately rhetoric:—

“ Good Mr. Vice-Chancellor:—

Having found it necessary to transport myself out of England, and not knowing when it will please God that I shall returne againe, it becomes me to take care that the university may not be without the service of a person better able to be of use to them than I am like to be, and I doe therefore hereby surrender the office of Chancellor into the hands of the said university, to the end that they may make choyce of some other person better qualified to assist and protect them, than I am. I am sure he can never be more affectionate to it. I desire you as the last suite I am likely to make to you, to believe that I doe not fly my country for guilt, and how pas-

sionately soever I am pursued, that I have not done anything to make the university ashamed of me, or to repent the good opinion they had once of me, and though I must have no further mention in your publique devotions, (which I have always exceedingly valued,) I hope I shall be always remembered in your private prayers, as
 Good Mr. Vice-chancellor.

Your affectionate servant,

CLARENDON.

Calais, ibis 7-17 Dec., 1667.

As compared with the universities of the old world, or even with some of our own, Amherst is but a young college. But she already is in the foremost rank. She has made her ample contribution to science, to literature, to professional and public life. Into whatever paths your feet may go, you can cherish no manlier sentiment than to love

“ This glorious lady with the eyes of light,
 And laurels clustering round her lofty brow ;”

—like Canning, to deem her approbation the highest honor and prize of life ;—like Webster, to bring your best powers, if need be, to her service and defence ;—like Clarendon, in misfortune and sorrow, to find comfort in the thought that you have done nothing to make her ashamed of you.

It is certainly a hopeful sign, or rather an emphatic proof of the great regard in which a college training is held, that we celebrate with so much interest the days on which classes of young scholars take their place in the life of the country. Every new state, as it comes into the great family, hastens to establish its university. Men who have enjoyed, men who have been denied these advantages in

their own youth, vie with each other in liberal benefaction. The voluntary gifts made by private citizens to universities and colleges, estimating only those large enough to be mentioned in the newspapers, and only those which came in that way to the notice of the bureau of education, amounted in 1872 to more than \$8,000,000, and in 1873, the last year before the great depression of business, to \$11,226,977. The number of young men who receive the degrees of our colleges, not including the professional schools, is a little more than thirty six hundred annually.

I am therefore brought naturally and almost inevitably to this topic—THE PLACE OF THE COLLEGE GRADUATE IN AMERICAN LIFE.

I might well hesitate, coming from other studies, to deal with a subject which has been the theme of so many abler speakers, and which must have filled so large a space in the instructions of this place. What I have to say is simple and fragmentary. But upon a matter so vital, every suggestion may have its value. It will be something, even to make commonplaces more commonplace; something, out of the experience of life, to add the testimony of a man of the world to the axioms, the truisms, which you have heard from the college pulpit or the professor's chair.

The longer I live, and the more carefully I study the influences which affect the political action or determine the history of this people, the more I am impressed with the need of the constant reiteration

of a few very old and very simple truths. Every child that is born needs to learn for himself to walk, and to talk, and to understand the meaning of common words. Every new citizen, whether he grow into this freedom from infancy, or come from abroad, or come out of slavery, is to learn for himself the simple duties of citizenship. The teacher of the people, and the teacher of the teachers of the people, have first and chiefest of all to teach these plain lessons.

All our constitutions are based upon the theory that the people are to be educated. The influence of the college graduate in the republic may therefore be said to be after all, differing in degree only, so far as this theory is carried out,—the influence of the citizen in the republic. But he ought at least to be the best educated man in the republic. His active life begins with attainments which come to others, if they come at all, painfully and late. Even when others tread the same paths, it is expected of him—

“ἀίεν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπερέχων ἐμμένει ἀλλῶν.”

I understand the training of the college graduate to differ from that of other citizens in this: In the common school, and the technical or professional school, the principal purpose is to acquire knowledge—something that the pupil is to know and use;—moral and intellectual training is but an incident. The college makes discipline its principal end, and the mere acquisition of knowledge is secondary. A trained intellect, a cultivated taste, a quickened and